Conference on Disarmament

11 February 2015

Original: English

Note verbale dated 26 January 2015 from the Permanent Mission of Austria addressed to the Acting Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament transmitting the text of the joint statement on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons delivered by New Zealand on behalf of 155 States during the First Committee at the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 October 2014

The Permanent Mission of Austria presents its compliments to the Acting Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and has the honour to transmit herewith the "Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons", delivered by New Zealand on behalf of 155 States during the First Committee of the sixty-ninth United Nations General Assembly on 20 October 2014. As the current coordinator of the "Humanitarian consequences joint statement process", Austria kindly requests this document be issued as an official document of the 2015 Session of the Conference of Disarmament.

GE.15-02409

1502409

Please recycle

Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons delivered by Ms. Dell Higgie, Ambassador of New Zealand

I am taking the floor on behalf of the following Member States: Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia and my own country New Zealand; the Observer States of the Holy See and State of Palestine; and non-UN Member States Cook Islands and Niue.

Our 155 countries are deeply concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. Past experience from the use and testing of nuclear weapons has amply demonstrated the unacceptable humanitarian consequences caused by the immense, uncontrollable destructive capability and indiscriminate nature of these weapons. The fact-based discussion that took place at the first and second Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, convened respectively by Norway in March 2013 and by Mexico in February of this year, has allowed us to deepen our collective understanding of those consequences. A key message from experts and international organisations was that no State or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation or provide adequate assistance to victims.

The broad participation at those Conferences, with attendance most recently in Nayarit, Mexico, by 146 States, the International Committee of the Red Cross, a number of UN humanitarian organisations and civil society, reflected the recognition that the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are a fundamental and global concern. We warmly welcome Austria's announcement of a third Conference, scheduled for 8-9 December 2014. We firmly believe that it is in the interests of all States to participate in that Conference, which aims to further broaden and deepen understanding of this matter, and we welcome civil society's ongoing engagement.

This work is essential, because the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons affect not only governments, but each and every citizen of our interconnected world. They have deep implications for human survival; for our environment; for socio-economic development; for our economies; and for the health of future generations. For these reasons,

we firmly believe that awareness of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches and efforts towards nuclear disarmament.

This is not, of course, a new idea. The appalling humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons became evident from the moment of their first use, and from that moment have motivated humanity's aspirations for a world free from this threat, which have also inspired this statement. The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have been reflected in numerous UN resolutions, including the first resolution passed by this Assembly in 1946, and in multilateral instruments including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The world's most eminent nuclear physicists observed as early as 1955 that nuclear weapons threaten the continued existence of mankind and that a war with these weapons could quite possibly put an end to the human race. The First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD-1) stressed in 1978 that "nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilisation." These expressions of profound concern remain as compelling as ever. In spite of this, the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have not been at the core of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation deliberations for many years.

We are therefore encouraged that the humanitarian focus is now well established on the global agenda. The 2010 Review Conference of the NPT expressed "deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons". That deep concern informed the November 26 2011 resolution of the Council of Delegates of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the decision in 2012 of this General Assembly to establish an open-ended working group to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. It underlies the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States' call to the international community, in August 2013, to emphasise the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons during any discussion of nuclear issues. In September 2013, at the High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament, numerous leaders from around the world again evoked that deep concern as they called for progress to be made on nuclear disarmament. 125 countries supported the Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons delivered at the 2013 First Committee. Today's statement again demonstrates the growing political support for the humanitarian focus.

It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances. The catastrophic effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design, cannot be adequately addressed. All efforts must be exerted to eliminate the threat of these weapons of mass destruction.

The only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again is through their total elimination. All States share the responsibility to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, to prevent their vertical and horizontal proliferation and to achieve nuclear disarmament, including through fulfilling the objectives of the NPT and achieving its universality.

We welcome the renewed resolve of the international community, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross and international humanitarian organisations, to address the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. By raising awareness about this issue, civil society has a crucial role to play side-by-side with governments as we fulfil our responsibilities. We owe it to future generations to work together to do just that, and in doing so to rid our world of the threat posed by nuclear weapons.